

# "Ethnic Indigo Culture in the Multi-Societies Area of Sakon Nakhon, Thailand: Ethnic Wisdom, Local Identity Construction, and Commoditization in the Process of Glocalization"

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**Abstract:** "Indigo culture" is a body of traditional knowledge of natural dyeing and color creation that has been intertwined with humanity since ancient times, encompassing many cultures worldwide. This includes the ethnic indigo culture in the multi-society area of Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand. Sakon Nakhon's physical landscape comprises plains and rivers, highlands, and mountains, resulting in biodiversity and ethnic diversity. This includes the Lao, Phu Thai, Yo, Yoi, So, and Kaleng ethnic groups, as well as newer communities such as Chinese and Vietnamese who have settled in the city. Their socio-cultural interactions have made Sakon Nakhon a distinctive multi-ethnic society in Thailand.

Each of the aforementioned indigenous ethnic groups possesses its own indigo culture, in both traditional knowledge and the preservation of their ethnicity through indigo dyeing. This has been elevated to the point of creating a unique local identity for Sakon Nakhon and commodifying this culture within local interactions with globalization, a process known as "Glocalization." This has led to the phenomenon of "new indigo culture," arising from the interaction among ethnic wisdom, the government's creation of a local identity, and the commodification of traditional ethnic indigo culture into a new product under conditions of Commoditization. With government support focused on domestic production and distribution, and with the help of young entrepreneurs in Sakon Nakhon, the project has developed traditional indigo-based products from Sakon Nakhon's ethnic groups into Glocal-style apparel that embodies an environmentally conscious philosophy. This initiative is dynamically interwoven with the Indigo World network and national and international groups who appreciate pure, natural products.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Indigo Culture, Local Wisdom, Local Identity Construction, Commoditization, Glocalization

## Introduction

Ethnicity refers to groups of people at the basic level of local society; local society is part of the nation-level society, and the nation-state is a unit of global society, which is also shaped into a global group of people through various processes of globalization (Rex, 1996). Therefore, ethnic groups are interwoven through interactions among one another within the same local social area, forming a multicultural society. At the same time, they are shaped into a part of the nation-state through nation-state processes, including political, governmental, and cultural mechanisms (Tarling & Gomez, 2008). However, amid the complex interactions of modern human societies, in some cases, ethnic societies in small local areas on the surface of the earth interact directly with global modernity through various activities, including some groups consuming ethnic identity in modern global society. This consumption of ethnic identity, including clothing, music, arts and culture, as well as ethnic wisdom, leads to the development of ethnic culture to meet the needs of new global groups. This process, called “GloCalization” (Robertson, 2014), is a crucial issue in modern society, and such phenomena are found throughout the world in various forms, including in Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand.

Sakon Nakhon Province is a multi-ethnic area comprising six indigenous ethnic groups: Tai Lao, Phu Tai, Yo, Yoi, So, and Kaleng. All groups share a common characteristic: the traditional knowledge of indigo dyeing, using a native plant. The production and use of indigo-dyed products in daily life have become one of the most distinctive ethnic indigo cultures in Thailand, establishing a unique local identity for Sakon Nakhon (Prinyaphon, 2015). Simultaneously, this tradition has been commercialized and recognized internationally; for example, the Bhukram brand, a Sakon Nakhon-based ethnic indigo product from the mountains, was selected as one of nine global brands for its commitment to environmental conservation. Therefore, ‘Ethnic indigo culture’ in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand, is the primary focus of this study.

## Research Methodology

This research is a basic qualitative study that collects data through fieldwork in the multicultural society of Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand. This area encompasses six ethnic groups: Lao, Phu Thai, Yo, Yoi, So, and Kaleng, as well as Thai people of Chinese and Vietnamese descent residing in Sakon Nakhon's urban area. The researcher studies the phenomenon of Ethnic Indigo Culture among these ethnic groups, focusing on the academic aspects of Ethnic Wisdom, Ethnicity, and the revival and commodification of indigo culture. The research also examines the phenomenon of Local Identity Construction by the Sakon Nakhon local government through the lens of ethnic indigo culture. The research findings are presented descriptively and analytically, with accompanying images. The research results are as follows:

### **Part 1: Different Physical Spaces and Ethnic Group Diversity**

Sakon Nakhon is located in the northeastern part of Thailand. The area is situated at a high altitude. The population consists of the six original ethnic groups mentioned earlier: Lao, Phu Thai, Yo, Yoi, So, and Kaleng. All groups have indigo cultures tied to their physical space, passed down from their ancestors. In addition, there are also Chinese and Vietnamese people residing in the area. These are two new groups that recently migrated to Sakon Nakhon and settled together. The co-existence of multiple groups has made Sakon Nakhon a multicultural and socio-economic area (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Education Office, 2015).

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Physically, Sakon Nakhon is part of the Sakon Nakhon Basin. The soil structure is sandy loam: loose, easily permeable, and non-retentive, even with high rainfall. Sakon Nakhon has a tropical savanna climate (AW) with three seasons: summer from March to June, rainy season from July to October, and winter from November to February. Each season is related to the ethnic indigo culture here.



**Figure 1: The location of Sakon Nakhon Province on the map of Thailand and the physical map of Sakon Nakhon, encompassing mountainous areas, river basins, and Nong Han Freshwater Lake, which influence the settlement of six ethnic groups and are suitable for the origin and growth of both straight-podded and curved-podded indigo trees. The image shows the author, Dr. Hu Wenli, with indigo trees on Phu Phan Mountain and straight-podded indigo seeds at the Phu Thai community of Ban Klang, on the shores of Nong Han Freshwater Lake.**

Source: Hu Wenli, May 2, 2025

Sakon Nakhon comprises the river basin surrounding Nong Han Freshwater Lake, a large freshwater lake approximately 150 square kilometers in area with an average depth of 2.5 meters that retains water year-round. It receives water from the Nam Phung River, which flows from the Phu Phan mountain range. Nong Han is a rich ecosystem with diverse freshwater fish and is home to the Lao and Yo ethnic groups. In addition, Sakon Nakhon has river basins from several rivers. The most important river is the Songkhram River, a large river originating from the Phu Phan mountain range and flowing into the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom Province, with a length of 175 kilometers (Royal Irrigation Department, 2018). The river basin is the origin of the curved-podded indigo tree. This area is home to the Yoi ethnic group in Akat Amnuay District, who possess a traditional indigo dyeing culture in the important river basins of Sakon Nakhon.

The second type of area is the highlands and Phu Phan mountain range located in the south of Sakon Nakhon. It is characterized by a plateau between two mountain ranges, Phu Phan Noi and Phu Phan Yai, approximately 180 kilometers long, formed by the folding of the Earth's crust. The elevation ranges from 200 to 670 meters above sea level. This area has relatively abundant forests and is the origin of the dark indigo dye. It is an area that supports the settlement of highland ethnic groups, including the Kaleng and So, in the districts of Kut Bak, Phu Phan, Nikhom Nam Oun, Warichaphum, and Song Dao, who have a distinctive indigo culture passed down through the generations.

The area between the river basin and the foothills. It is a plain interspersed with undulating hills located in the districts of Mueang Sakon Nakhon, Phon Na Kaeo, and Kusumal, at an elevation of 150-160 meters above sea level. This area is inhabited by the Nyo, Phu Thai, Saek, and Tai Lao ethnic groups, as well as Chinese and Vietnamese who later settled in the region, contributing to the region's ethnic indigo culture as both producers and consumers (Saithong et al., 2010).



**Figure 2: A picture of the people of Sakon Nakhon in the past, in 1906, while receiving His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhap, the Minister of the Interior. The picture shows people from various ethnic groups, wearing indigo-dyed clothing in their respective ethnic styles.**

Source: National Archives of Thailand, Fine Arts Department, accessed February 2026.

The physical characteristics and ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon, as described above, have significantly influenced the development of wisdom in ethnic indigo dyeing. A key factor is the diverse physical landscape, which supports two types of indigo-producing plants – straight-podded and curved-podded – and provides suitable land for cotton and mulberry cultivation for silkworm rearing, spanning mountains, plains, and river basins. This has resulted in the six ethnic groups accumulating knowledge of fiber production, fabric making, and indigo dyeing, which has become a significant part of their ethnic identity.

## **Part 2: Local Wisdom and Ethnic Preservation through Indigo-Dyed Fabrics of Sakon Nakhon Ethnic Groups**

The wisdom of producing dye from indigo plants and dyeing fabrics with indigo is a crucial aspect of ethnic wisdom among the Sakon Nakhon ethnic groups. This is synonymous with “Local Knowledge” or “Local Wisdom,” which refers to knowledge produced by a group through learning from a specific local area and passed on from one generation to another (Geertz, 1983). Therefore, the production of dye from indigo plants and dyeing fabrics with indigo is both local wisdom and “Ethnic Wisdom.”

Furthermore, fabrics and clothing are essential necessities of life. The production of textiles and indigo dyeing is essential for every family. In every traditional ethnic community, cotton and indigo are cultivated, and indigo mud is stored in households for use as the main raw material in making indigo dyeing vats. This is used to dye cloth during the post-harvest season, when ethnic groups prepare fibers, weave cotton and silk, and make clothing for the following year. Indigo dyeing is a crucial step in producing ethnic clothing.

Furthermore, each group has a unique knowledge exchange. For example, ethnic groups in the mountains that cultivate large amounts of cotton would exchange cotton fibers for rice and fermented fish with communities in the lowlands, thereby creating social networks across different areas. However, in the past, regardless of the group, they typically produced only enough cloth for their family members to use for the year. Once they deemed it sufficient, they would stop production and restart it the following year (Chatiphod, 2024).

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Therefore, under the house of each ethnic household, there was always a loom and an indigo dyeing vat together. Both of these items have been reproduced and passed down from generation to generation through a gender mechanism, where women are responsible for the process of making the cloth and dyeing with indigo, while men are the main labor assistants, such as planting indigo and cotton, making the loom, preparing the dye solution, and mixing the indigo paste, etc.

The knowledge of indigo dyeing has three important steps: producing indigo mud from indigo trees to obtain indigo dye, preparing the dye solution from the indigo mud, and dyeing the cloth with indigo. The ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon share this traditional knowledge, as they live in the same area, even though it is a plain, a lowland area, and the Phu Phan mountain range. The various ethnic groups have mechanisms for exchanging and learning from each other as follows:

### 2.1 Traditional Wisdom of Indigo Mud Production

Indigo mud production involves synthesizing the indigo dye from the indigo plant and storing it in a mud-like form, hence the name "indigo mud." This mud is used to prepare dye vats when dyeing fabric with indigo. Therefore, in the past, each ethnic household in Sakon Nakhon cultivated indigo plants to produce indigo mud for dyeing clothes after the harvest season, a time when they prepared fabrics for making clothing for family members throughout the year. The process of making indigo mud begins with planting the indigo plant, an annual herb. Indigo seeds, mixed with ash to deter insects, are sown in clean, prepared soil, usually within the house grounds or nearby gardens. If planting a large quantity, sow in rows, leaving gaps for weeding. Then, a thin layer of soil covers the seeds, and the plants are watered lightly. The Sakon Nakhon ethnic groups typically sow seeds in late April or early May, when indigo plants sprout during the rainy season. The plants receive sunlight and rainwater naturally until, after four months, they reach a height of about one meter. At this stage, the indigo plants produce dark green leaves, after which they are harvested. Leaving about 20-30 centimeters of the indigo stem intact,

The indigo stem, branches, and leaves are soaked in water for 3 days to allow the indigo compounds to break down. The leaves soften and detach from the stems, so the remaining solid residue is separated, leaving only the water that has broken down the indigo dye. Then, lime (betel nut lime) is added to the water and stirred, alternating between scooping it out and pouring it back in to expose it to air. The indigo pigments in the indigo water will cling to the lime particles, separating from the water and forming indigo mud at the bottom of the container. The clear water is then poured off, leaving the indigo mud or paste formed by pigments that have coated the lime, which can be used in the next step of making indigo dyeing vats (Saithong & Khiewraksa, 2010).

During this soaking and stirring process, the indigo water and paste have a very strong odor, so much so that ancient indigo makers had to build huts outside the village to dye indigo. However, the dyeing process itself does not produce a strong odor, so indigo dyeing can be done under and around the house.

### 2.2 The Process of Making the Dyeing Tank and Indigo Dyeing

When dyeing fabric with indigo, ethnic groups use indigo mud to create a dye solution in an indigo dyeing tank called "Ko-Mo," meaning to create an indigo dye solution in a container called "Mo." This creates an environment for the indigo-fertilizing microorganisms in the indigo mud to multiply and adhere to the white fabric.

The indigo dyeing tank contains alkaline water at the appropriate salinity level. Clean water is soaked with wood ash, called "Nam Dang." Each ethnic group may use ash from different types of wood, but the goal is the same: to create the right salinity in the water to dissolve the indigo mud. Then, the ash is filtered from the water, the water is poured into the tank, and the indigo mud is added. Ethnic groups determine the formula through their traditional dyeing knowledge: one kilogram of indigo mud, three liters of ash-soaked water, and one gram of ripe tamarind pulp (some groups use water boiled with sour leaves instead of tamarind). The sourness of the ripe tamarind reduces the alkalinity of the lime in the indigo mud.

In the past, the dyeing tanks were made of hard earthenware and were called "Ko-Mo pots." Later, plastic tanks were used. Nevertheless, it is still called "indigo vat." The process of preparing the dye vat for dyeing fabric is called "making the vat," meaning creating the right conditions for the indigo-producing microorganisms in the vat to develop.

Once everything is mixed together, a wooden stick is used to stir the indigo mud and ripe tamarind pulp with water. A ladle is then used to scoop up the dye solution and pour it back into the vat, allowing the microorganisms to absorb oxygen from the air. This is done daily for about 7 days, resulting in a yellow dye solution that indicates a change in the indigo pigment in the vat, making it ready for dyeing fabric. Then, the white fabric to be dyed is immersed in the dye solution and squeezed to allow the indigo color to penetrate the fabric fibers. This is repeated until the desired color is achieved (Saithong & Khiewraksa, 2010).

After dyeing the fabric in the indigo vat, the ethnic groups will maintain the vat so it can be used to dye a new batch of fabric. This is done by adding indigo mud, ash water, and ripe tamarind pulp in the appropriate proportions, thereby preserving the indigo vat for the next dyeing session.

## 2.2 Ethnic Identity: A Case Study of Indigo-Dyed Fabric and the Lifestyles of Ethnic Groups in Sakon Nakhon

Ethnicity Identity refers to the state of an individual and a society regarding their belonging to a particular ethnic group, as determined by cultural characteristics, beliefs, traditions, rituals, language, history, and shared memories (Appiah, 2005). In this section, the researcher examines the expression of self through the relationship with fabric and indigo-dyed fabric products of various ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon Province, as described below:

### 2.2.1 Preparing Indigo-Dyed Clothing for the Year

In the past, before the spread of industrial-scale clothing production, clothing was a basic necessity for ethnic groups who had to produce it themselves. Each household had a loom under the house and an indigo dyeing vat under the eaves of the house or under the rice barn, as if the loom and the indigo dyeing vat were part of each home. Therefore, the preparation of fibers, the preparation of indigo paste, weaving of fabric, cutting and sewing of fabric into shirts and trousers, and indigo dyeing were part of the annual social calendar of every ethnic group.

In the past, the ethnic groups of Sakon Nakhon would prepare indigo mud and store it in their kitchens. When the harvest season was over, it was time to produce and dye fabric. They would extract indigo mud to make dye and dye the fabric. To prepare clothing for the next year's farming season and to replace old and worn-out clothes, they would produce only enough fabric for their family members to wear. Once they deemed it sufficient for the year, they would stop and restart the following year, because they were not producing it as a commodity as they do today (Srikhao, 2020).

### 2.2.2 Indigo-Dyed Clothing and Its Special Properties

Indigo-dyed clothing possesses special physical and aesthetic properties.

Physically, indigo-dyed garments have special properties that protect against UV rays from sunlight and wick away sweat, preventing a stuffy feeling. Indigo-dyed fabric thus caters to the lifestyles of all ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon, whose daily lives involve agriculture in fields and farms, raising cattle and buffalo in the forests and mountains, and gathering forest products for food. Indigo-dyed clothing is therefore well-suited for daily life spent outdoors.

At the same time, indigo-dyed fabric has distinctive aesthetic properties, making it suitable for wear on all occasions, including daily life in the community, traditional ceremonies, both auspicious and inauspicious events such as funerals, and formal office wear. Importantly, the indigo color of indigo-dyed fabric also has a distinctive aesthetic characteristic: everyone who wears it, regardless of their skin color or complexion, will appear elegant and graceful (Saithong et al., 2011).

Indigo-dyed fabric is, therefore, a magical textile suitable for everyone and every situation in which it is worn. Indigo dyeing is therefore a special traditional craft of all ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon, which has been used continuously and has become one of the widely recognized ethnic identities of Sakon Nakhon from the past to the present.

### 2.2.3 Gender and Indigo-Dyed Fabrics of Ethnic Groups in Sakon Nakhon

Gender refers to the consideration of "sex" through socio-cultural contexts. Because sex is constructed differently in each socio-cultural context, a single gender must consider the roles, behaviors, expressions, and socially constructed identities of girls, women, boys, men, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations. Unlike biological sex, gender influences how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others, as well as how social structures are determined (Davis et al., 2006). The researcher considered ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics from a gender perspective as follows:

Indigo-dyed fabrics are an important part of the daily lives of the Sakon Nakhon ethnic groups and are a crucial component of ethnic clothing production. There are three dyeing methods: 1) dyeing finished garments made from white cotton fabric with indigo in a dye vat; 2) dyeing cotton fibers before weaving them into fabric; and 3) dyeing the woven fabric from white cotton fibers with indigo before cutting and sewing it into clothing.



**Figure 3: Researchers collaborated on indigo dyeing with the Tai Yo ethnic group in Ban Klang community, on the shores of Nong Han freshwater lake, and with the Kaleng ethnic group in the Phu Phan mountains (last image). The first image shows the addition of ripe tamarind to the indigo dye solution to adjust the pH to a suitable level.**

Source: Hu Wenli, May 4-5, 2025

Furthermore, the latter case involves the accumulation of indigo-dyed fabrics for use throughout the year, as part of ethnic wedding ceremonies. Handwoven cotton fabrics dyed with indigo are given as gifts by the daughter-in-law to the husband's parents on their wedding day, underscoring the importance of indigo dyeing in family life and wedding ceremonies. This demonstrates the cultural wisdom of the Sakon Nakhon ethnic groups and highlights the need to pass on indigo dyeing skills to ethnic women. In addition, cotton fibers are used as a medium of exchange for rice and other goods among ethnic groups living in the Phu Phan mountains, where they are abundant. They would use cotton as a commodity to exchange for important products from ethnic groups in the lowlands, namely rice, fermented fish, and salt, as well as daily necessities such as matches (Srikhao, 2020). In addition to assigning the production of fabric and indigo dyeing as roles and responsibilities, ethnic societies also evaluate the value of women through the quality of fiber production, weaving, and indigo dyeing. This is because ethnic women are responsible for their family members' clothing and pass this knowledge on to their daughters and granddaughters. Therefore, all ethnic women, in addition to producing fibers and weaving fabric, must also possess the knowledge and wisdom to produce indigo mud, make indigo dyeing vats, and dye fabric with indigo. High-quality indigo dyeing is considered to produce a dark blue-black color in white cotton fabric, called "Nil Color" (because 'Nil' is a dark blue-black stone). This requires producing high-quality dyeing vats and the patience to dye multiple times.

The reason the ethnic groups of Sakon Nakhon value indigo-dyed fabrics, considering them as black as obsidian, is that the intense color of indigo relates to their daily lives spent gardening, farming, foraging, and working under the sun and rain. The fabric had to be easy to wear and convenient for these activities. The dark blue color protected their skin from the sun and concealed stains. Upon returning home, they would simply dip the fabric in water, rub it, and dry it for reuse the next day. Therefore, good indigo-dyed fabric, in the eyes of the ethnic groups, was a deep blue-black color. Women who could dye fabric to this dark blue-black were considered virtuous and valuable members of the Sakon Nakhon ethnic group (Srisamran et al., 2015).

#### 2.2.4 Indigo Dyeing and Traditional Clothing of Various Ethnic Groups

Before the development of the textile and garment industry, the production of fibers and fabrics, the dyeing of indigo, and the wearing of indigo-dyed clothing were part of daily life. In the daily lives of ethnic groups, there was at least one indigo-dyed garment. The way ethnic people wore indigo-dyed clothing was relatively simple, reflecting the simplicity of their social lifestyle and its integration with the physical environment. Especially for outdoor work such as farming, cultivating fields, and gathering forest products, they would wear indigo-dyed shirts and sarongs. Women's sarongs were called "pha sin," and the bottom might have a patterned border.



**Figure 4: Photographs of the traditional clothing of ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon in the past, from left to right: 1) A Tai Lao ethnic woman, taken in 1906; 2) A Tai Nyo ethnic woman with fishing equipment in Nong Han freshwater lake (taken in 1906); 3) A Tai So ethnic woman from Muang Kusumal in traditional attire for a religious ceremony, taken in 1922; and 4) A Kaleng ethnic man from Phu Phan Mountain in his everyday work attire, taken in 1906. All the clothing of each group is made from handcrafted fabrics dyed with indigo.**

Source: National Archives of Thailand, Fine Arts Department ([www.nat.go.th](http://www.nat.go.th)) Accessed on February 2026

For formal attire and special religious and ceremonial occasions, each group has a unique identity that identifies them as belonging to a particular ethnic group. Ceremonial clothing is produced with more special craftsmanship. The Phutai, Kaleng, and Nyo ethnic groups in the lowlands are more meticulous in creating patterns than those in the mountains. This is because they have closer relationships with other groups, thus adopting a wider range of clothing cultures. Ethnic groups in the lowlands create patterns on fabrics using the ikat technique, which is used for lower garments, such as the sarong called "sin mi," signifying formality, while the shirt may be white. This is worn for ceremonies such as going to the temple, making merit during the Buddhist Lent, at the end of the Buddhist Lent, and at weddings (Samutkhupti et al., 1994).

In all, whether wearing clothing in daily life or for special occasions, it is all connected to the indigo production and dyeing system, a wisdom passed down from generation to generation through the cultural system of gender, from grandmother to mother, mother to daughter, through the process of assisting in the production of fibers, weaving cloth, dyeing indigo, and producing clothing in their ethnic communities.

### **Part 3: Four Decades of Stagnation and Dormancy of Sakon Nakhon's Ethnic Indigo Culture**

From a historical perspective, the stagnation and dormancy of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture are closely related to the National Economic and Social Development Plan, which has stripped the wisdom of indigo weaving from the lives and societies of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic groups. This can be explained as follows:

In 1961, Thailand began using the first National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961-1966), using national economic targets as indicators to determine the direction and plans of various areas. The plan aimed to accelerate the development of economic infrastructure, namely electricity, irrigation, and transportation; to create economic growth through agriculture and import substitution; and to establish subsequent National Economic and Social Development Plans up to the present, namely the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027), which aims to transform Thailand into a "progressive society with a sustainable value-creating economy" under the philosophy of sufficiency economy, encompassing production, opportunity creation, and sustainability. (National Economic and Social Development Council, 2026)

Thailand's development under the National Economic and Social Development Plan has impacted the social, cultural, and ethnic changes in Sakon Nakhon. Young people and working-age individuals from rural areas have been drawn away from their hometowns to work in industrial factories, while some pursue higher education beyond compulsory schooling in the hope of securing higher salaries in the civil service or the private sector. This represents a new source of income, a departure from their previous reliance on traditional agriculture passed down from their ancestors in their local communities.

In 1964, midway through the first National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Thai government established the first higher education institution in Sakon Nakhon: the Sakon Nakhon Teacher Training School. Later, it expanded to include bachelor's degrees and, in 1995, became Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, encompassing various faculties, including the Institute of Language and Culture Research, which initiated research on indigo dyeing. In 2004, it was upgraded to Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, with a Center of Excellence in Indigo that plays a significant role in reviving and developing Sakon Nakhon's indigo culture. (Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, 2024)

In 1972, the Royal Thai Army built an airfield with the primary mission of military operations and receiving the royal aircraft of the King of Thailand (King Rama IX) when he stayed at the Phu Phan Royal Palace, which was built in 1975 in the Phu Phan mountain range. In 1985, this airfield was developed into a commercial airport. Currently, there are many flights between Bangkok and Sakon Nakhon, making Sakon Nakhon easily connected to Bangkok and other countries.

The results of national development from various National Economic and Social Development Plans, in relation to modernization and changes in global society, coupled with advancements in technology, the textile and garment industry, and printing media, presenting modern fashion and clothing, have impacted Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture. This has affected the traditional aesthetic principles governing the wearing of indigo-dyed clothing by ethnicity. Modernity and contemporary fashion have led young people living in the outside world to view it as outdated and to abandon wearing and preserving it. Furthermore, traditional indigo-dyed fabric is a symbol of laborers in the fields and forests, while fabrics and clothing from industrial factories, including branded goods and city tailors, have overshadowed it. The bodies of ethnic people have been transformed into modern urban dwellers.

However, some ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics still remain, mainly among some elders living in rural villages. They continue to produce indigo-dyed fabrics for personal use, out of habit and unfamiliarity with factory-made fabrics. Meanwhile, many elders in ethnic villages use both indigo-dyed and factory-made fabrics for clothing when traveling to districts and the city of Sakon Nakhon, for example.

The above context has led to a disruption in the production and transmission of ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics for nearly forty years. Therefore, over these four decades, the ethnic indigo culture of Sakon Nakhon has essentially been dormant, without being completely cut off from its original indigo culture (Chatiphod, 2024).

#### **Part 4: Reviving Sakon Nakhon's Ethnic Indigo Culture in the Context of Thailand's Grassroots Economic Development**

The Sakon Nakhon ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics, dormant since 1961, were gradually revived in 1992 and became vibrant again during the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001). This followed advances in the textile and garment industries and modern lifestyles, which separated the lives of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic communities from their traditional indigo culture. This was especially true for younger generations who turned to modern clothing products, following the patterns of modern society that had spread throughout the country and were connected to contemporary global trends.

However, alongside modernity and globalization, there was a growing demand for clean, healthy, environmentally friendly products, or "eco-friendly products," that avoided chemicals, as well as for products that reflected the unique identity of a particular locality, especially ethnic traditional products. Coupled with the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan of the Thai government during this period, which promoted the development of the grassroots economy from the

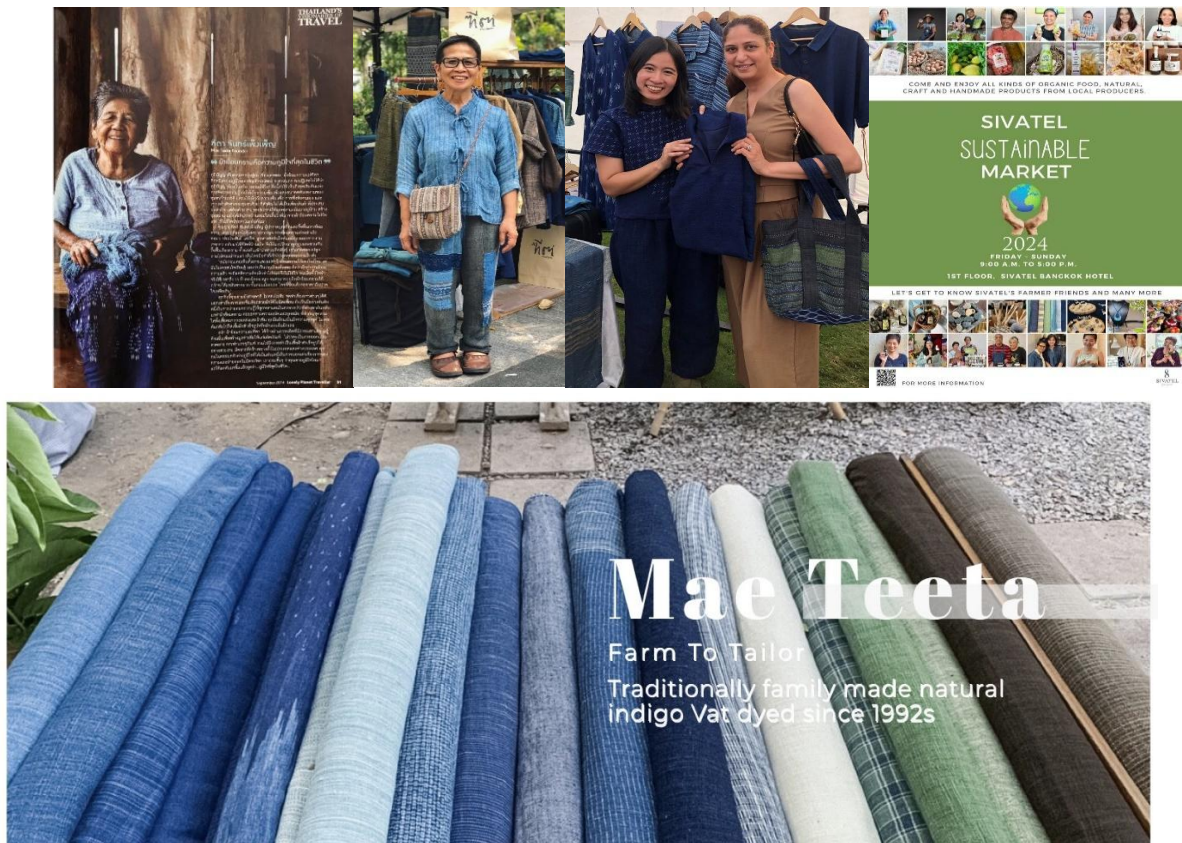
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cultural capital of each locality, alongside the balanced development of the export-oriented industrial economy, the Thai state created the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) project (Chatiphot, 2024).

The above context has influenced the revival and redevelopment of the ethnic indigo culture of Sakon Nakhon, as follows:

4.1 Mae Teeta Brand: A Pioneer in Bringing Sakon Nakhon Ethnic Indigo-Dyed Cotton Fabrics to Non-Cultural Consumers

In 1992, indigo-dyed fabric products from the multi-ethnic community of the Phu Thai and Tai Lao ethnic groups in Ban Na Dee, Na Hua Bo Subdistrict, Phanna Nikhom District, Sakon Nakhon Province, appeared for the first time in Bangkok as a product of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture under the brand name "Mae Teeta." The name of the elderly Phu Thai woman who produced this indigo-dyed cotton fabric was chosen because the community is located at the foot of the Phu Phan Mountains, at the boundary between the lowlands and the mountains.



**Figure 5: (Top) Image of Mae Teeta Chanphengphen, an individual in the indigo-dyed ethnic culture; image of Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai (Mae Teeta's daughter, 2nd generation successor) and Miss Sukhjit Daengjai (Mrs. Prapaiphan's daughter, 3rd generation successor) with indigo-dyed and natural dyed fabric products of the Mae Teeta brand.**

Source: Facebook Page "Mae Teeta", accessed on January 28, 2026

The "Mae Teeta" brand of indigo-dyed fabrics is a product of traditional ethnic wisdom, originally produced by Mae Teeta Chanphengphen for her daily use. It has been commoditized by Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai, Mae Teeta's daughter, who graduated in Community Development from Chiang Mai University. She encouraged her mother, "Mae Teeta," to form a small group of women in

the village to revive the disappearing craft of dyeing cotton fabric with indigo for sale. The product is branded "Mae Teeta" after her mother and is sold at a local product fair at Kasetsart University, Bangkok, 1992. This collection of indigo-dyed cotton products from Sakon Nakhon received overwhelmingly positive feedback from consumers. Simultaneously, it brought Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo-dyed textiles to national recognition for the first time.

Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai presented the Mae Teeta brand as "natural products, emphasizing sustainable coexistence between humans and nature. These products are environmentally friendly, ranging from preserving the wisdom of ethnic indigo-dyed textiles to elevating it into contemporary fashion for the younger generation. The process is entirely handmade, from cotton cultivation and weaving to natural indigo dyeing. Teeta's products include hand-woven indigo-dyed cotton fabrics, fashion clothing, accessories, and everyday items made from indigo-dyed cotton." She also opened her home to consumers, allowing them to see the traditional production process, from building the indigo dyeing vats to dyeing the cotton fibers, with an indigo garden in the backyard on display. For weaving, Mrs. Prapaiphan assigns work to members at their homes, and the finished products are then combined (Daengjai, 2026).

"Mae Teeta" is a brand that revives and revitalizes the ethnic indigo-dyed textile products of Sakon Nakhon through the collaboration of two generations: Mae Teeta Chanphengphen. As individuals imbued with traditional indigo-dyed ethnic wisdom, and with her daughter, Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai, bridging the gap between ethnic wisdom and globalization,

Mae Teeta is a pioneering brand that has elevated Sakon Nakhon's indigo-dyed fabrics to widespread recognition. It has proven to the ethnic communities of Sakon Nakhon the value and worth embedded in their own ethnic indigo culture, which had been dormant for four decades. While many collaborators of the Mae Teeta brand have since branched out to create their own products, Mae Teeta remains a strong brand, a legendary pioneer in bringing ethnic cultural capital to distinctive Global Style products.

Currently, the Mae Teeta brand is being carried on by the third generation, Ms. Sukhjit Daengjai, daughter of Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai and granddaughter of Mae Teeta Chanphengphen. Ms. Sukhjit Daengjai has developed the products to be more diverse and modern, while maintaining the original principle: "Products from nature, emphasizing sustainable coexistence between humans and nature" (Daengjai, 2026).

Mae Teeta thus represents a new form of wisdom in revival and transmission from generation to generation, between the grandmother's generation, whose life was connected to the ethnic indigo culture of the past, and the daughter, Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai, and the granddaughter, Ms. Sukhjit Daengjai. This is a continuation of ethnic wisdom, not merely to perpetuate ethnicity within their own community, but rather a continuation and commoditization that leads to the revival and creation of new benefits, or revitalization, within the beautiful context of globalization.

#### 4.2 Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University: A Local Public Higher Education Institution and Its Role in Revitalizing Sakon Nakhon Indigo Culture

Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University is the main higher education institution in Sakon Nakhon Province. Its development began as a "Teacher Training School" (1964), then upgraded to "Sakon Nakhon Teacher College" (1970), became a Rajabhat Institute (1992), and finally became Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in 2004 (Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, 2024). The transition period from

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Rajabhat Institute to Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University coincided with the beginning of the revitalization of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture.

Specifically, in 1997, Assist. Prof. Anurak Saithong, then the Dean of the Faculty of Science at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat Institute... She is a chemist who received a research grant from the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) to study indigo and indigo dyeing from a biochemical perspective. NSTDA recognized the potential to develop indigo-dyed textiles made by ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon into marketable products. At that time, indigo production among ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon had almost ceased, except for the Teeta group, which had revived and been producing indigo products for sale since 1992. Therefore, she collaborated on biochemical research with the Teeta group, including Mrs. Prapaiphan Daengjai and Mother Teeta Chanphengphen. The research team included personnel from the social sciences and sciences faculties at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. Assist. Prof. Anurak Saithong, as the team leader, served as the academic advisor, explaining indigo wisdom through science and integrating Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University with Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture.

During her research, Assist. Prof. Anurak Saithong found that almost every household in the ethnic communities of Sakon Nakhon had earthenware jars and pots that had been used as indigo-dyeing vats but had been abandoned for some time. However, when questioning the ethnic women, particularly the mothers-in-law group aged fifty and above, they all still remembered the wisdom of indigo dyeing, had worn indigo-dyed fabrics, and could revive the indigo-making process. Meanwhile, those aged forty had all seen their mothers-in-law make indigo mud and dye with indigo when they were children.

Assist. Prof. Anurak posed a biochemical research question: Why do the green leaves of the indigo plant produce a blue dye? She found that indigo dyers faced several problems that could not explain the phenomenon, resulting in many incorrect "taboos," such as prohibiting menstruating women from creating indigo dyeing vats and forbidding the expansion of indigo dyeing vats in each household. It was believed that if one violated this rule, they would become "Phi Pob," meaning "possessed by an evil spirit," which was considered an obstacle to the modern development of indigo (Saithong & Daengjai, 2002).

In 2001, the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) organized the "Indigo Dyeing Seminar in Thailand" at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University to disseminate research on indigo dyeing and revive traditional indigo dyeing practices among local communities. The seminar consisted of two parts. In one part, Assist. Prof. Anurak Saithong presented wisdom on indigo dyeing from a biochemical perspective, using science to explain unexplained phenomena in the dyeing process.

The second part involved meeting silk indigo dyers. Experts from Surin province, who were 92 years old at the time, were invited to learn about the complex indigo dyeing process that is more intricate than cotton dyeing. Indigo cotton dyers from various ethnic groups in Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Nakhon provinces were also invited. NSTDA invited a network of researchers and interested individuals from across the country, including journalists, to participate. Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University also invited ethnic weavers and indigo dyers in Sakon Nakhon who were interested in attending the seminar (Saithong et al., 2011).

The "Indigo Dyeing Seminar in Thailand" attracted far more participants than anticipated. Assist. Prof. Anurak Saithong, as the organizer, stated that... Villagers from various ethnic groups in lowland, foothill, and mountain communities hired vehicles to travel in large numbers to attend a

seminar at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. Importantly, they were all dressed in dark blue indigo-dyed fabrics, creating a dazzling sight at the seminar venue that resembled a swarm of black ants. The large number of ethnic villagers from Sakon Nakhon attending the seminar far exceeded expectations, overflowing the conference room, requiring seating outside, and the installation of closed-circuit television for viewing the seminar and demonstrations of silk and cotton indigo dyeing. This reflected the renewed interest in reviving indigo-dyed fabrics for commercial purposes as a form of commoditization in the modern social context of that period.



**Figure 6: Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University, through its Indigo Excellence Center, organized the project “Beneath the Auspicious Royal Footsteps: The Enduring Legacy of Sakon Nakhon’s Indigo-Dyed Textile Heritage and Wisdom,” in collaboration with all ethnic groups of Sakon Nakhon. A fashion show featuring indigo-dyed textiles was held at Romklao Secondary School, Khok Si Suphan District, Sakon Nakhon Province, on August 11, 2025, in partnership with Guangxi MinZu University, China. Dr. Hu Wenli presented indigo-dyed textile designs from the Dong ethnic group at the fashion show. (Figure 1) Dr. Hu Wenli (Figure 2), accompanied by a group of indigo-dyed textile artisans and models, poses with artisans from various ethnic groups participating in the project.**

Source: Chutima Phulawan, August 11, 2025

Following the indigo dyeing seminar in Thailand, several newspapers and magazines published articles about it, leading to Sakon Nakhon indigo gaining national recognition. Simultaneously, indigo and traditional ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics were brought back into the awareness of their cultural capital, and modern consumers recognized the value of indigo-dyed fabrics. This phenomenon awakened the seemingly dormant ‘ethnic indigo culture of Sakon Nakhon,’ bringing it to life and propelling it onto the international stage, forming a crucial foundation for the development of the Indigo Excellence Center of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University today (Saithong et al., 2011).

#### 4.3 The Thai State and the Revival of Sakon Nakhon's Ethnic Indigo Culture

The Thai state in this context refers to both the central government and its representatives at the local level, namely Sakon Nakhon province. Both parts have played a significant role in the dynamic revival and reproduction of Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture since 2001, as explained below:

##### 4.3.1 ‘OTOP’ and the Revival of Sakon Nakhon's Ethnic Indigo Culture

In 2001, the Thai government under Prime Minister Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra created the One

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Tambon One Product (OTOP) project. This national project, with the slogan "Creating products from villages to cities," aimed to promote the grassroots economy. It encouraged communities to use local wisdom, resources, and raw materials to develop high-quality, unique products for sale, generating income for themselves, their families, and their communities. At the same time, the Thai state provided each village with a 1-million-baht village fund to manage, create jobs, and increase income. Therefore, it is also known as... The "Million Baht Fund"

The central government passed the policy on to provincial-level local governments for implementation. This involved integrating relevant agencies, such as the community development and provincial commerce departments, to develop OTOP products in each village. This was achieved by establishing community enterprise groups. Initially, most members were elderly women possessing local wisdom. Therefore, local communities in Thailand during this period were in the context of "re-invention of tradition."

In this context, local community enterprises in Sakon Nakhon province as a whole have revived indigo-dyed fabric as their main product because it is a cultural heritage that can be easily revived and given a new purpose. Indigo-dyed fabric thus becomes a large product group, "goods from village to city." This is evident whenever community enterprises from Sakon Nakhon showcase and sell their products anywhere. The booths of Sakon Nakhon community enterprises are often overflowing with blue indigo-dyed fabrics, unlike those in other provinces, which usually offer a variety of products, earning Sakon Nakhon the recognition as the "Land of Indigo" (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Office, 2018).

### 4.3.2 'Indigo-dyed Fabric' as a Representative Image of Sakon Nakhon's Local Cultural Identity

In the context of the OTOP program of the central government of Thailand, in addition to having a boisterous impact on the re-invention of tradition and commoditization at the national level, for Sakon Nakhon province, it has also elevated 'ethnic indigo-dyed fabric' to be a representative image of the cultural uniqueness of Sakon Nakhon province. This is explained as follows:

Following the revival of Sakon Nakhon indigo through the re-invention of tradition and commoditization by the Teeta brand and research into indigo wisdom by university researchers, coupled with the Thai government's creation of the OTOP (One Tambon One Product) project and the Million Baht Fund in every village across the country, the dormant indigo-dyed fabrics of Sakon Nakhon have been awakened, with special support from Thai government policies.

During the same period, every province in Thailand was developing its own cultural identity. Each province selected its distinctive local culture. To elevate it to a provincial cultural tradition, Mr. Pranchai Bowonratanapran, then Governor of Sakon Nakhon Province, played a key role in establishing the Beehive Procession as a provincial tradition. He also requested cooperation from government officials and the people of Sakon Nakhon to wear indigo-dyed fabrics every Friday, so that indigo-dyed fabrics would become a unique characteristic of the province, and to make Sakon Nakhon both a "Land of Indigo" and an "Indigo City" simultaneously (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Office, 2018).



**Figure 7: Opening Ceremony of the 2025 Bee Castle Festival, a provincial tradition, presided over by the Governor of Sakon Nakhon Province, Mr. Chusak Rueying, along with various groups of people from Sakon Nakhon Province. This provincial-level event serves as a platform to showcase the identities of all ethnic groups through their attire, highlighting indigo and indigo-dyed fabrics as the main textiles for provincial-level wedding attire, emphasizing that Sakon Nakhon is the Indigo City and/or Land of Indigo.**

Source: Sakon Nakhon Provincial Public Relations Office, (<https://sakonnakhon.prd.go.th>) Accessed on March 15, 2026.

The policy of the Governor of Sakon Nakhon Province has enabled the younger generation in Sakon Nakhon to wear indigo-dyed clothing, as do ethnic groups. They have witnessed the special and amazing qualities of indigo-dyed fabric. The younger generation in Sakon Nakhon has found that indigo-dyed fabric is comfortable to wear, gentle on the body, and excellent at absorbing sweat. Importantly, indigo blue is a magical color that lends elegance to everyone who wears it, regardless of gender, age, skin color, or personality. Everyone looks good wearing it. Moreover, it is a fabric suitable for all situations in life and society. Wearing just one outfit made of indigo-dyed fabric allows one to attend a wedding ceremony in the morning, go to work during the day, and attend a funeral after work. If it weren't for indigo-dyed fabric, each of the three activities would require different attire.

The younger generation of Sakon Nakhon says that once they wear indigo-dyed fabric, they fall in love with its charm. Indigo-dyed fabric has become the signature attire of the people of Sakon Nakhon. Many wear only indigo-dyed fabric every day and for all activities of their lives, both daily and special occasions, such as the attire of Sakon Nakhon brides and grooms today, as well as wearing it to participate in the province's annual traditions and festivals, especially the Red Cross Fair and the Sakon Nakhon New Year Festival. Both events featured a stage for self-expression and fashion shows showcasing six ethnic groups, as well as Thai-Chinese and Vietnamese people. Each group used the fashion show to present their identity as representatives of their ethnicity and community. Their costumes were all made from ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics. In particular, the Thai-Sakhon Nakhon women of Vietnamese descent presented their identity as Thai-Vietnamese Sakon Nakhon residents wearing Vietnamese-style Ao Dai dresses made from indigo-dyed fabrics during the fashion show (Kerdmalai, 2019).

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Therefore, "indigo and indigo-dyed fabrics," in addition to being revived ethnic cultural products for commoditization, also served as an important element in representing the process of constructing the identity of the people of Sakon Nakhon.

### **Part 5: Ethnic Indigo Culture of Sakon Nakhon in the Context of Commoditization**

The term "Commoditization" refers to the process of turning a set of cultures into a commodity for consumption by other groups (Hayes, 2016). Ethnic indigo culture has been clearly commodified since 2001. Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo is fully commoditized, significantly impacting the interplay between the "Ethnicity" of the Sakon Nakhon ethnic groups as the original owners of the indigo culture and the "Modernity" of new consumers outside the culture, who may have needs and tastes that are both similar and different from those of the original. Modern Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture is therefore in a situation of invention of tradition, which can be categorized into two main types: Commoditization of community enterprise groups and Commoditization of the new generation in the form of Glocalization, as follows:

#### 5.1 Community Enterprise Groups for OTOP Indigo-Dyed Fabric Products

The community enterprise group for indigo-dyed fabric products emerged with support from national and provincial governments working in coordination under the OTOP policy and the Village Development Fund. The government has encouraged ethnic groups with diverse traditional knowledge to form community enterprises to revive and produce their products for sale. The government provides production funding and marketing support. In this context, the community enterprise groups in Sakon Nakhon focus on reviving indigo-dyed fabrics, which have become a key product category in the province, known as "OTOP Indigo-Dyed Fabric Products."

The key producers in each group are usually senior figures with experience in indigo dyeing and production, who lead the revival and production process, passing on the knowledge to their daughters, mostly middle-aged women working in the villages, who inherit the craft and handle the sales. These community enterprises are therefore often referred to as "mother-mother groups."

For community enterprises, there are two main consumer groups. The primary group consists of contemporary individuals in Sakon Nakhon province, almost all of whom wear indigo-dyed clothing on various occasions, in line with the province's policy. This has become a new style of dress for Sakon Nakhon residents in daily life, formal events, and ceremonies. The second group comprises consumers outside Sakon Nakhon. These consumers purchase products at government-organized OTOP (One Tambon One Product) fairs in Bangkok and other provinces, as well as through presentations by their descendants who are working and studying in Bangkok and other provinces. These descendants often act as intermediaries, connecting with new consumer groups and learning about their needs. This has led to improvements in the aesthetics of indigo-dyed fabrics for sale, deviating from the traditional value system. Traditionally, good indigo-dyed fabrics were valued only for their uniform weave and for being dyed a deep "dark blue." For some consumers, the preferred texture is a lighter indigo dye with a rough, uneven surface. This has led community enterprises to learn about the commoditization of ethnic indigo-dyed fabrics. This has led to diverse transformations in ethnic indigo-dyed textile products from their original form (Harinsai & Chernkwan, 2021).

#### 5.2 Young Entrepreneurs of Sakon Nakhon and Indigo Glocal Products

Over the past approximately 10 years, young people in Sakon Nakhon, including descendants of ethnic groups in the lowlands and mountains who have continued the OTOP business from their

grandmothers and mothers, as well as young people in Sakon Nakhon city who have been captivated by indigo, have created brands and developed products from indigo-dyed textiles as young entrepreneurs. They thus become a bridge between traditional ethnic indigo culture and modern international fashion and clothing, blending local identity with the global world. This phenomenon is called Glocalization, while these products have a characteristic called “Glocal style” (Robertson, 2014).

Ethnic indigo products from Sakon Nakhon, fused with Glocal Style, often embody an ideology of environmental care. They weave their businesses into the indigo world network and national and international groups that appreciate pure natural products, using various methods, including storytelling that relates to the area, the ethnic groups possessing traditional knowledge, pristine nature, and compassion for nature and the environment.

These young entrepreneurs, mostly young, own multiple brands. Each brand has dynamically integrated Sakon Nakhon's ethnic indigo culture with national and international indigo culture networks. Here, the researcher cites Bhukram as an example, one of nine global brands selected to showcase at the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Conference. This demonstrates their commitment to quality in creating products that bridge the gap between a remote local area and the global arena, reflecting the current trend of environmental awareness and love. Bhukram's products thus represent another group within the context of GloCalization.

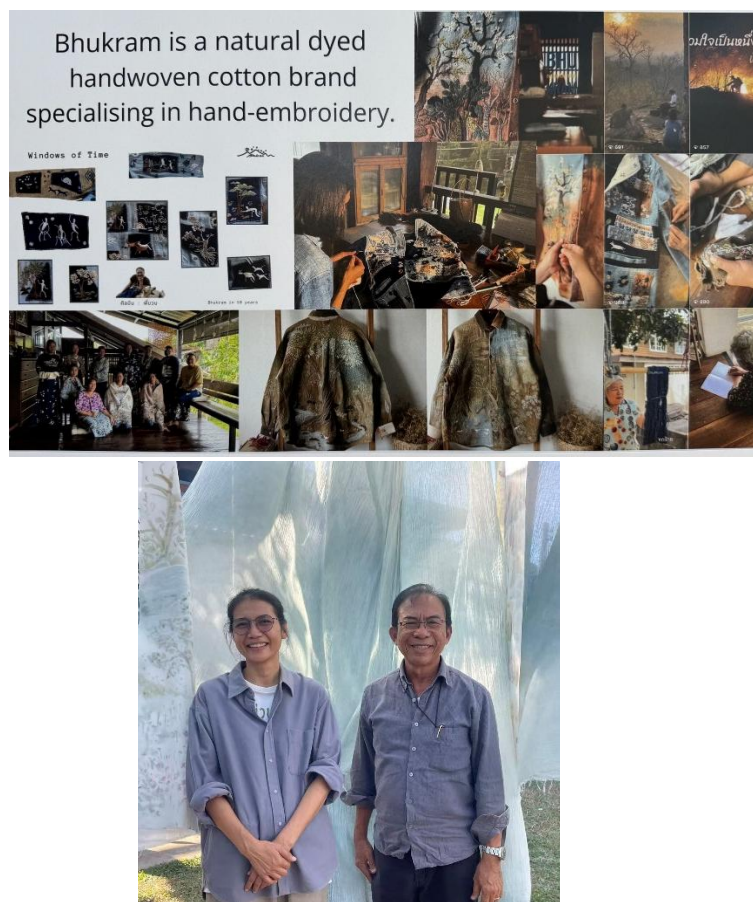
#### 5.2.1 Bhukram: A New Generation Brand Connecting Mountain Ethnic Groups with the Global World

“Bhukram” is a brand of indigo-dyed and natural dyed fabrics created by Ms. Pilan Thaisuang, a young entrepreneur from Sakon Nakhon. The brand name means “indigo mountain,” and its slogan is “Nothing is Bigger than Nature.” The brand is based in Ban E-Teng, a small mountain village in Kut Bak District, Sakon Nakhon Province, Ms. Pilan's birthplace and where she grew up. This village is a multicultural community in the heart of the Phu Phan mountain range, comprising the Kaleng, Tai Lao, Saek, and So ethnic groups, and Bhukram is an integral part of this multicultural community in Ban E-Teng.

#### 5.2.2 Origin and Development

Ms. Philanth Thaisuang (Interview: 2026) After graduating from secondary school in a local community in the Phu Phan mountain range, she pursued bachelor's and master's degrees in archaeology at Silpakorn University, Bangkok. While studying and working as an archaeologist in Bangkok, she also acted as a 'broker,' bringing indigo-dyed textile products from mountain communities to sell in Bangkok. She saw that ethnic indigo-dyed textiles were highly valued in the modern world, but they needed a development process grounded in a clear concept and ideology. Ms. Philanth decided to quit her job and return to her hometown in the Phu Phan mountain range to learn from local wisdom, as it holds ethnic wisdom and provides inspiration, aligning with her goal of creating a product brand tied to nature and indigenous ethnicity. She wanted to care for and protect the traditional indigo culture and protect the environment in Phu Phan simultaneously. Philanth brings new experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints from modern society to Phu Phan, bridging the two through her brand, Bhukram. She started building the “Bhukram” brand at her home in the Phu Phan mountains in 2015.

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**Figure 8: (Image 1) Poster for the Bhukram 2026 Open House event; (Image 2) Ms. Philanth Thaisuang with researcher, Professor Supachai Singyabuth, at Bhukram house in the Phu Phan mountain range.**

Source: Supachai Singyabuth, February 5, 2026

Ms. Philanth began by revisiting her self-identity, focusing on the lifestyle, daily life, and unique circumstances of the people in her community on Phu Phan. She therefore chose a team of local villagers who live and work there, producing cotton fibers and weaving and dyeing with indigo, based on principles that respect nature. She found that the physical space of Phu Phan is changing daily, and her products are constantly in relation to this changing environment. Therefore, each product collection is also a reflection of change.

Bhukram's target consumers are modern, mid-to-upper-income market segments who appreciate environmentally friendly, chemical-free products with strong ethnic cultural roots, natural purity, and unique designs that blend local and modern elements, a concept known as "GloCal Style," as reflected in the brand's slogan, "Nothing is Bigger than Nature." Bhukram products and the brand emphasize a simple aesthetic, avoiding the opulence of luxury goods. Bhukram quickly gained national and international recognition and success, being selected as one of nine global brands to present at the 2019 International Sustainable Development Conference and subsequently invited to showcase and promote its products at major international events. (Thaisuang, Interview: 2026)

### 5.2.3 Embroidery and a New Perspective on Traditional Ethnic Culture on Fabric

Ms. Philanth discovered that indigo dyeing is not just about dyeing; it also contains stories of people's lives, society, nature, and the environment. She presents these stories on indigo-dyed fabrics

through embroidery, created by local ethnic women who are also the dyers and weavers. They work in an integrated manner, and importantly, their lives are intertwined with the stories of Phu Phan Mountain.



**Figure 9: Field research work at Bhukram House in E-Teng Village, Kut Bak District, Sakon Nakhon Province, in the Phu Phan mountain community (Figure 1). Researcher Dr. Hu Wenli is dressed in Glocal Style clothing from the Bhukram brand, which features embroidered fabric.**

**(Figure 2) Bhukram's unique clothing and other products feature indigo-dyed fabric and embroidered stories. Each product is presented through storytelling throughout the process, as if it were a living product. Approximately 5 months before the sale.**

Source: Hu Wenli, August 9, 2026

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Bhukram has transformed ethnic women from the mountains into artists of embroidery art on fabric, respecting the individuality of each embroiderer. They are able to incorporate what they have absorbed and present it on indigo-dyed fabrics through embroidery. Bhukram's fabrics and products, therefore, embody the originality of people because each human being has unique characteristics.

#### 5.2.4 Product Presentation Process through Storytelling

Every Bhukram product is presented through "storytelling in every dimension" on the Bhukram page via social media. This includes the unique characteristics of the product, its relationship to the environment, nature, and the production process, especially the content appearing in the embroidery patterns, as well as stories about the weavers, dyers, and embroiderers. Bhukram is meticulous in the professional quality of storytelling, spending approximately 4-6 months telling the story on social media. As a result, each product has a large following. Even if a consumer expresses interest in purchasing in advance, Bhukram will not sell it until they have ensured that the product has been comprehensively presented and has a sufficient following.

This shows that each product has a life of its own and must be presented to the public sufficiently before it ultimately falls into the hands of its owner.

#### 5.2.5 Open House at Bhu Kram: An Exhibition of Life, the Forest, and Indigo-Dyed Fabric



**Figure 7: Bhukram Open House event on Saturday, February 7, 2026.**

Source: Facebook Page "Bhukram", Accessed on January 20, 2026.

The Bhukram Open House is one of the activities that showcases Bhukram's holistic identity and builds relationships between consumers from around the world and the ethnic mountain people. It allows consumers to see the products and work processes that are interwoven with nature, the environment, and the lifestyle, society, and culture of the people in the Phu Phan mountains. Everything is integrated as one, leading to a key question for those attending the Bhukram Open House:

"Do you see our products in the forest?"

The "Bhukram Open House" event is held every February. In 2026, it was held on February 7,

2026. The Bhukram Open House has drawn people from across the country and the world to the mountain village, to visit the ethnic mountain community, and to learn about the wisdom of cotton and fiber production, indigo dyeing, embroidery, and trekking, to experience the context and environment that are the roots and spirit of Bhukram products. Because everything is integral to Bhukram products.

Therefore, Bhukram is more than just fabric and products; it is a holistic, unified whole that connects fabric and products with nature, the environment, the way of life, and the ethnic society and culture of the Phu Phan Mountains. It embodies love, care, and compassion for all things mentioned above. This has led to Bhukram being selected as one of the nine leading brands in the global eco-friendly product market. From a small point in the Phu Phan forest, it aligns with the growing trend of eco-friendly, nature-conscious products prevalent worldwide.

## Discussion

Research on indigo culture in the multicultural area of Sakon Nakhon, Thailand, reveals the crucial importance of 'color' in clothing. Therefore, indigo and indigo dyeing represent a cultural heritage of color in clothing, encompassing both the production and transmission of indigo paste from locally available indigo plants. This has become a local wisdom of ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon province. While the clothing styles and attire of each group may differ slightly in daily life and rituals, indicating their identity and differentiation from other groups, overall, indigo and indigo-dyed fabrics among the various ethnic groups in Sakon Nakhon constitute one of the most prominent "ethnic indigo cultures" in Thailand.

Therefore, in the context of establishing a local identity at the provincial level, ethnic indigo culture has been elevated and constructed to become the identity of the people and society of Sakon Nakhon, leading to Sakon Nakhon being recognized as "Indigo City" and "Land of Indigo." Simultaneously, amid government-promoted commoditization and the global trend toward consuming clean, environmentally friendly products, indigo culture continues to thrive. The indigo dyeing tradition of Sakon Nakhon has been revitalized in various ways, becoming a "new ethnic indigo culture" that intricately weaves together the original ethnic indigo culture with new functions and diverse consumer groups at the local, national, and global levels. This has affected the interaction between 'ethnic indigo' and the various people and cultural groups mentioned above, giving rise to a new indigo culture and to interactions between the local area and globalization. This has resulted in the emergence of products in a "GloCal Style," making the scope of indigo culture in the multicultural area of Sakon Nakhon a fascinating part of the global multicultural space today.

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